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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Brazil: The Views of President-Designate Figueiredo

President-designate Figueiredo has expressed strikingly contrasting views on a number of issues closely related to the eventual liberalization of the political system. Because of his ambivalence, many Brazilians must now be wondering what Figueiredo's true opinions on this all-important subject really are and how deep his expressed commitment to a political "opening" in fact is.

Figueiredo's first formal political speech, delivered on 9 April on the occasion of his "nomination" as the government's presidential choice, was a notably conciliatory statement. In his remarks, Figueiredo discussed fundamental questions indicating an intention to follow President Geisel's lead in working toward a gradual opening of the tightly controlled political system. In his speech, Figueiredo waxed considerably more liberal, however, than he did during the preceding week when, in a series of lengthy media interviews, he hewed to a fundamentally authoritarian line with only a sprinkling of democratic notions.

In his remarks to the pro-government ARENA politicians who had just "nominated" him for the presidency, Figueiredo

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stressed political and social issues, rather than the strictly economic and security themes that have generally preoccupied the military over the years. Very early in the statement, Figueiredo alluded to the long-standing domination of the government by the executive branch and suggested that some change in tone could be expected. He said that the "structure" he envisions as appropriate for the achievement of national aspirations is based on an "active congress representing the many currents of thought among the electorate" and a "dynamic judiciary respected in all instances." The reference to "various currents of thought" is widely taken to mean that Figueiredo is giving serious consideration to the creation of more political parties.

The president-designate also spoke of the need to manage the economy to meet the needs of the people. Specifically, he stressed the importance of holding down inflation, which "erodes the purchasing power of salaries" while still maintaining a growth rate that allows for some expansion of the job market. He also said he recognizes a need to carry out "with ever greater determination" the task of reducing social disparities. To this end, Figueiredo promised a major effort to promote job training, eradicate malnutrition, and, in general, better meet the health needs of Brazilians.

Figueiredo formally associated himself with the concept of a gradual opening of the political system that the military has put in place. He declared that as president, he will "have to ensure the continuity of a program of political, economic, and social consolidation that is being unfolded in stages without being afraid to revise some established concepts in the process." The statement was almost universally taken to mean that Figueiredo intends to retain and add to whatever liberalizing measures Geisel puts in place by the end of his term next March. Figueiredo cautioned, however, that "tolerance must not be confused with permissiveness" and added that politicians must act "responsibly." He capped the substantive portion of his speech by saying that "the times call for reconciliation and understanding, but with neither patronizing accommodation nor intransigence."

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While Figueiredo in his formal speech was conciliatory, he was contentious in wide-ranging, impromptu remarks to the press during the preceding week, greatly unsettling public opinion. Indeed, a number of opposition congressmen and the nation's leading newspapers expressed serious concern over the views he proffered in several extensive interviews.

Figueiredo gave vent to opinions that echo the familiar rhetoric that has long been used to justify the military's dismantling of the civilian political system and its retention of sweeping controls over national life. Figueiredo stressed, for example, the need for the state to continue to have the "instruments to protect society," an obvious reference to the all-encompassing national security laws the officers decreed and still enforce. The General frequently fell back on the well-worn argument that Brazil "is in the midst of a revolution" (by the military), as when he defended President Geisel's temporary closure of congress last year when it balked at certain authoritarian laws the regime wanted enacted.

On the subject of selecting presidents, Figueiredo said he favors indirect elections which, he said, are as "legal and democratic" as direct elections. Indeed, he indicated his conviction that Brazilian voters are simply not yet capable of voting "intelligently" enough to justify direct balloting.

Still, Figueiredo insisted he does favor a political opening that involves some greater degree of civilian participation in government and the easing of some political controls. He defended, for example, the right of students to demonstrate so long as they restrict themselves to campuses. He hinted that he might favor rescinding a recent measure that established indirect election of one-third of the national senators. Figueiredo added that he favors direct election of state governors, currently chosen by state assemblies.

During the week of the media "blitz" a noteworthy clash occurred between the president-designate and a leading senator of the nominal opposition party. Figueiredo, in an interview, called the senator, an advocate of greatly liberalized rule, a "false democrat" who had arrogantly abused his authority years ago as a

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state official. The senator categorically rejected the charges and went on to say that if Figueiredo, as the nation's top intelligence official, believed such unsubstantiated information, the nation's intelligence apparatus must be woefully inept.

Other opposition legislators reacted strongly to Figueiredo's views. The president of the party, for example, said he was more convinced than ever that Brazil's problems could not be solved merely by rotating the presidency among the officers. "The system is wrong" he declared, and its "arbitrariness must be discarded without delay." An opposition congressman said that Figueiredo's remarks proved the General was "not prepared" for the presidency, while another regarded as "offensive" the candidate's negative comments on the capacity of Brazilians to vote intelligently.

Two of Brazil's leading dailies, O Estado de Sao Paulo and Jornal do Brasil, were no less disturbed. O Estado termed some of his ideas "incoherent" and others "inconsistent," noting the "crudeness of his attitude toward reality." The paper said that, judging by Figueiredo's remarks, one must conclude that his idea of consensus consists of "bowing to the will of the prince." This, said O Estado, hardly seems like a way to approach liberalization. Jornal do Brasil acknowledged Figueiredo's frankness and his courage in undertaking the dialogue but said his opinions raised "worrisome questions." The same paper went on to say that the General's statements reveal "questionable understanding" of what democracy should be and equally questionable understanding of Brazil's current situation.

At this point, Brazilians are uncertain whether the views expressed to ARENA or those splashed in the media represent the true intentions of the president-designate. Figueiredo, himself, appears uncomfortable with the aftermath of his free-swinging encounters with the media. He clearly intended the sessions as a means of making himself better known nationally and of enhancing his -- and the military's -- image by being readily accessible to the reporters and forthcoming on pertinent issues. Figueiredo has since, in effect, acknowledged that his "shoot from the hip" style was, if anything counterproductive.

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He has now let it be known that at least for awhile he will limit his press exposure and may even resort to insisting that questions be submitted in advance.

Indeed, since the nomination acceptance speech, Figueiredo has been publicly silent. But his withdrawal from the limelight may not have been his decision alone.

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Figueiredo's inconclusive but disquieting performance has undoubtedly left some Brazilians more skeptical than before as to the sincerity of Geisel's promise to institutionalize an "opening" by the end of his tenure. At the same time the populace is more anxious than ever to see what, if anything, the administration will do or say to prove the "opening" is still in the works. Geisel and Figueiredo both know they have a difficult task before them if they are to win greater popular acceptance, as each has said he hopes to do. If the administration perceives that popular dissatisfaction has grown appreciably as a result of Figueiredo's foray, it may feel obliged to try to regain lost ground by advancing the timetable of its proposed reforms.

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